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ACTESA holds third stakeholders meeting

Zambian Minister of Agriculture Hon. Peter Daka has challenged the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) to find markets for the many staple crops produced in the region that go to waste.

Hon. Daka said this during today's official opening of the third ACTESA stakeholders and partners' meeting in Lusaka, Zambia.

He noted that large quantities of staple crops have no access to markets and urged ACTESA to build a regional cross border agricultural trade agenda that would strengthen innovative market institutions and link chronically food insecure smallholder farmers with growing regional and national markets for staple crops.

He said smallholder farmers should not remain locked in subsistence agriculture if they are to be globally competitive.

Hon. Daka emphasised the importance of diversification of crops as a way to enhanced food security.

"You need to challenge our markets to change this mindset about staple crops, people should not look at only one staple crop as food, utilizing many crops can change our livelihoods," he said.

Hon Daka further called for more research stations on plant and crop diseases to be established.

"We do not have many research stations to look at plant diseases; we should look at this because there is a relationship between crop diseases and human health," he said.

Hon. Daka also urged farmers to be mindful of climate change and advised them to adopt appropriate agricultural production methods and practices to reduce the effect of climate change.

He thanked cooperating partners, for their continued support to COMESA and ACTESA and for their constant support to the Zambian Government in the agricultural sector

COMESA Secretary General, Sindiso Ngwenya said ACTESA would make a difference in the agricultural sector because it has been bringing together farmers and policy makers to dialogue and that it covers smallholder agricultural issues in the region irrespective of whether a country belongs to COMESA or not.

He further expressed his satisfaction that development partners were working with COMESA and ACTESA and were coming together as one front on the ACTESA agenda.

He thanked the development partners for their support especially Dr. Peter Ewell from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). He further thanked ACTESA CEO, Cris Muyunda for the work being done in ACTESA and noted that ACTESA was realising the CAADP agenda by implementing activities spelled out in the CAADP Pillars.

East African Farmers Federation (EAFF) President and ACTESA Advisory Committee Chairperson, Phillip Kiriro said following the establishment of ACTESA, there had been great progress in rallying regional stakeholders to put together meaningful programmes in important areas.

He said ACTESA has moved fast to establish programmes in input supply, livestock markets, value chain development, commodity market linkages and strengthening capacities for enabling policymaking.

He encouraged ACTESA to link with previous existing and emerging initiatives in the agricultural sector and as regards trade focus on emerging market trends and challenges, production systems and productivity, policies and marketing infrastructure.

Dr. Peter Ewell commended ACTESA on the progress it was making. He said ACTESA was a great opportunity that would open up markets for farmers to enable the region to be more food secure.

"We have a critical mass of partners linked to the broader COMESA role of opening up markets and free trade and the more important one of opening up markets for small holders, this has been conceptualized in CAADP and in line with a series of commitments and initiatives in the region; ACTESA provides an activity to coordinate that," he said.

Dr. Ewell encouraged the private sector to be involved in the agricultural agenda including value chains and urged governments to be more proactive in providing an enabling environment to help smallholders utilise the opportunities available to them.

ACTESA CEO, Cris Muyunda in his keynote address, focused on four paradigm shifts to be used by the Agency in its implementation agenda. These include:

1. To deepen collaboration and partnerships with the private sector
2. Empower and work with women and youth in the region
3. Focus on high impact value chains.
4. Move from policy discussions to policy and programme implementation at national and regional levels.

Dr. Muyunda said the emphasis areas were key for the success of the ACTESA agenda and noted that the ongoing work on the design of the Regional CAADP Compact would assist in providing the necessary future shifts in ACTESA's work.

ACTESA holds 3rd Stakeholders Meeting (Contd)

"We will continue to work with various research and analytical institutions to continuously review, update and inform ACTESA activities," he said.

Dr. Muyunda thanked the development partners for their support in helping ACTESA implement practical and beneficial programmes.

COMESA and EU sign agro input project

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the European Union (EU) on May 10, 2010 signed a contribution agreement in support to the COMESA Regional Agro Inputs Programme (COMRAP).

COMESA Secretary General, Sindiso Ngwenya, the Head of the EU delegation in Zambia, Dr. Derek Fee and Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) CEO, Dr. Cris Muyunda attended the signing ceremony at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia.

The COMRAP which will be implemented by ACTESA, as a Specialized Agency of COMESA, has an overall objective to contribute to improving rural food security and livelihoods in the COMESA region. The project's focus is on improving access to finance and expanding access to productivity enhancing inputs particularly fertilizer and seed.

COMRAP is funded through the EU Food Facility, a specific EU instrument operating over the period 2009-2011. The COMRAP has a budget of Euro 20 million.

Speaking during the signing ceremony, Mr. Ngwenya said COMRAP was designed to increase agricultural productivity through enhanced access to three intertwined factors; finance, fertiliser and seed.

He said COMRAP would ensure that at least 40% of its beneficiaries, in form of farmers reached and agro dealers trained were women given the great role that they play in the agricultural sector in the region.

"COMRAP assists COMESA to meet key objectives of the COMESA Treaty particularly those under Chapter 18 of the COMESA Treaty which clearly state that COMESA is responsible for harmonization of policies, stabilization of agricultural commodity prices, coordination in bulk purchases of inputs and ensuring adequate supply and availability of food commodities," Mr. Ngwenya said.

Dr. Fee said the impact of rising food prices was particularly harsh in the COMESA region, and all policy players should play their part in addressing the phenomenon.

He said the Food Facility was a very substantial response from the EU as it addressed two key policy components, that of direct support to the poorest consumers and the stimulation of an effective supply-side response by the agricultural sector by enhancing its ability to produce food.

"While the first set of measures of the Food Facility concentrated on national programmes, the second set of programmes included regional interventions led by Regional Organisations," Dr. Fee explained. "It is within this context that € 20 million has been allocated to COMESA for its agro-input programme."

COMRAP was established in line with the decision taken by the COMESA Council of Ministers in 2008 to facilitate regional seed trade and provide farmers with more crop and variety options at lower prices.

Specifically COMRAP will:

- a) Increase access to structured financial services by farmers, reduce interest rates and increase the volume of loans to smallholders. It will promote weather indexed insurance to assist farmers' hedge against droughts and reduce the bank risk perception of the agricultural sector. The programme will reach over 700 bank executives and front office staff, as well as over 100 insurance officers;
- b) Establish a network of about 6,000 certified agro dealers in COMESA's landlocked countries where the costs inputs are highest;
- c) Ensure that 3,000,000 smallholder farmers have improved and sustainable access to agro-inputs and services in the COMESA region, particularly in 8 landlocked countries;
- d) Harmonize and Improve seed trade regulations throughout the COMESA region, quickly building on the seed harmonization programs already undertaken by other RECs. This will allow the seed industry in the region to expand seed provision to smallholders as presently only 5-10% of smallholders are reached with improved seeds in the region;
- (e) Support seed multiplication activities by farmer organizations in the region.

ACTESA signs 6-year MoU with AFSTA

The Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) to facilitate the provision of quality seed to farmers in the region.

The MoU is meant to enhance cooperation between the two parties to provide access to quality seed for farmers in the region and establish specific seed industry support activities to enhance industry competitiveness at national and regional levels.

Consequently, ACTESA will work closely with AFSTA to ensure the seed industry develops at a fast pace and matures into a more reliable, affordable and competitive source of seed in the COMESA region especially catering to the needs of smallholder farmers.

During the signing ceremony, ACTESA Chief Executive Officer, Cris Muyunda said the provision of quality seeds to farmers would enhance food security in the region as seed is one of the most important components in agriculture.

Dr. Muyunda said signing the MoU with AFSTA would help improve on quality seed supply and good crop yields in the region.

He said ACTESA signed the MOU with AFSTA to signal emphasis on partnership with the private sector who are crucial in providing sustainable investments in the provision of services such as input supply, commodity storage, transport facilities, finance, processing facilities, quarantine facilities as well as market information among other key service areas.

ACTESA signs 6 years MoU with AFSTA (Contd)

AFSTA immediate past president, Mr. Marcel Kangungwe, said seed was an important farming input required to enhance food security.

And AFSTA Secretary General, Justin Rakotoarisaona said his association would ensure that the MoU with ACTESA was implemented effectively.

Donors commend ACTESA

Donors have commended ACTESA for the progress that has been made over just one year, particularly, the Agency's commitment to working with the private sector.

This was contained in a donor statement produced by representatives from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Food Programme (WFP), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the European Union (EU), during the third ACTESA Stakeholders' meeting that was held in Lusaka over the two day period 11-12 May, 2010.

The donors further stated that they would look for ways to work together to support ACTESA's strategic and operational plans, join forces on project designs, monitoring and evaluation, review missions and consider other means for more formal coordination over the longer term.

Other issues contained in the statement detailed how ACTESA should coordinate its activities effectively and that future ACTESA Stakeholders' meetings should be organized around feedback on progress towards results in each of the objective areas of the Alliance.

All the presentations and supplementary documents can be downloaded from the ACTESA website <http://www.actesacomesa.org>

AFSTA MoU signing



COMESA and EU sign agro input project



Stakeholders Meeting

